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AUTHOR Jess, James D.
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ABSTRACT

Theories by Sergiovanni and Vaill suggest that what a leader stands for and communicates to others is qualitatively more important than how that leader behaves, given any particular set of circumstances. Quality is the primary criteria for determining successful educational practices today as measured by the Secondary School Recognition Program's 14 success attributes and 7 success indicators. At the federal level, anti-rural bias is being corrected through the "Rural Education and Rural Family Education Policy for the 80s." The urban to rural population shift, increased pooling of rural resources, and the renewed attention that small schools are receiving from educational associations and citizens groups are trends that may influence local leadership and provide quality rural education. An agenda for facilitating local leadership and quality education in rural America is in place--the Rural Education Committee is working toward 10 initiatives outlined in the Department of Education's policy for the 80s. Those states critical of rural schools must realize that if they close their rural schools, they close their rural communities. With vision and leadership rural education can continue to successfully contribute to the values which have helped keep our nation strong. An appendix lists themes from the Rural Education Association's national rural education research agenda. (PM)

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by

James D. Jess

CAL Community School District

Latimer, Iowa

National Rural Education Forum

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James D. Jess

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A Paper prepared for the U.S. Department of Education Forum, Kansas City, Missouri, August 12-14, 1985.

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ABSTRACT

LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY EDUCATION
Issue Paper by: James D. Jess

Leadership theory and research emphasize too much what leaders actually do and not enough the meaning they communicate to others. Thomas J. Sergiovanni's 10-P Model of Quality Leadership incorporates ten principles that he feels are requirements for quality in leadership. What the leader stands for and communicates to others is more important than how he or she behaves given any particular set of circumstances.

Quality is the primary criteria for determining successful educational practices today. The Department of Education's Secondary School Recognition Program uses 14 attributes of success and 7 indicators of success to examine rural, small city, urban and suburban schools for national recognition in the SSP Program.

State and federal educational policies in the 1970s tended to discriminate against rural education. An unintentional, but nevertheless existing anti-rural bias in American society caused this to happen. At the federal level that problem is being corrected through the Department's Rural Education and Family Educaton Policy for the 80s.

The shift in population growth from urban centers to rural areas is a trend that shows strength for rural America's future. Other trends that may influence local leadership and quality rural education over the next 5 to 10 years are the renewed attention that small schools and rural districts are getting from educational associations and citizens groups; the increased practice of pooling rural resources and using new technologies to expand educational opportunities; the recent creation of a number of University Rural Education Centers; and mixed responses to the Nation at Risk report by state policy makers.

An agenda for facilitating local leadership and quality education in rural America is already in place--it merely needs to be followed through. The Rural Education Association, representing a cross-section of the Nation's experts in rural education, has developed a national rural education research agenda. The Department's Rural Education Committee is working toward the 10 initiatives outlined in the Department's rural education policy for the 80s. State policy makers need to recognize the strengths of their small schools and rural districts and provide rural education in their states with an equitable share of the state's attention and resources. Those states that are critical of rural schools must realize that if they close down their rural schools they are, in essence, closing down their rural communities.

Rural America has traditionally provided this Nation with outstanding leadership in education, business, industry and government. Rural values have helped keep our Nation strong. Rural education has been successful in the past, it is successful today and with vision and leadership it will be successful and productive in the future.

Summary of the State of the Art of Knowledge from Research, Educational Practice, and Current Policies

In this paper, the writer has chosen to limit his remarks on leadership theory and research primarily to the works done by Thomas J. Sergiovanna and Peter Vaill. Comments concerning quality education and practices are drawn from the material used and the information gathered by the Department of Education in the national Secondary School Recognition Program. Observations concerning current policies reflect the writer's personal encounters as a practicing rural educator and one who has been actively involved in rural education issues.

Leadership Theory and Research

The most influential writers on leadership bluntly conclude that leaders do not make much of a difference on the effectiveness of their respective organizations. Their persuasive argument is based on strong evidence that the activity of leadership is both dull and mundane.[1]

One well-known theorist, James G. March, argues that leaders are interchangeable (assuming equal basic managerial competence); one leader makes no more significant impact on the organization than another.[2] He uses a light bulb metaphor; light bulbs are necessary but indistinguishable. Any light bulb manufactured to standard will do the job as well as another.

Thomas J. Sergiovanni concludes that part of the problem for this discouraging news is that theory and research have emphasized too much what leaders actually do and not enough the more symbolic aspect of leadership--the meaning they communicate to others.[3] This shortcoming is most noticed in our almost exclusive emphasis on leadership objectives.

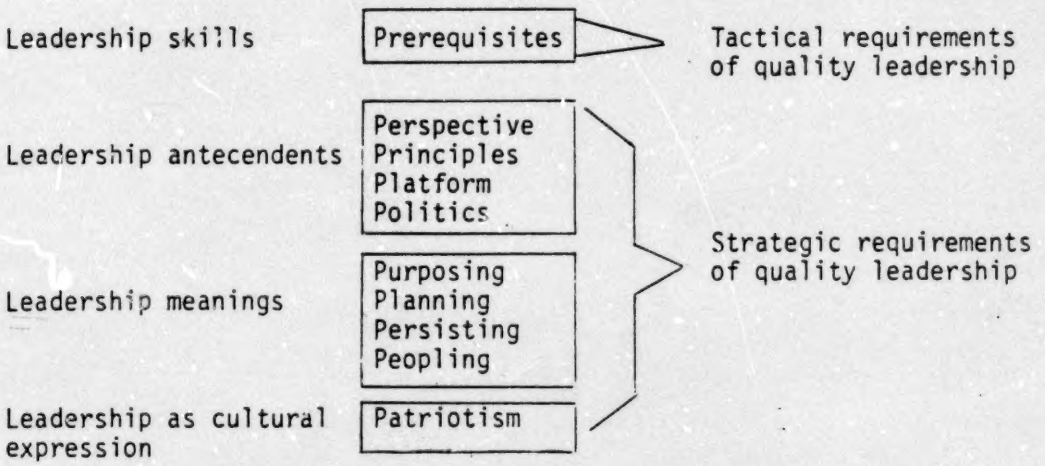
leadership behavior, leadership outcomes, and measurable leadership effectiveness. The instrumental or tactical aspects of leadership have received attention well beyond their contribution to leadership quality because they are easy to teach and learn, specify, easily measurable, can be readily packaged for workshops, and otherwise accessible according to Sergiovanni. "Missing from these tactical issues are holistic values of purpose, goodness, and importance as well as an emphasis on long-term quality schooling."[4] Sergiovanni feels that by emphasizing leadership tactics, we miss the whole point of what leadership is and can be and that we need a strategic view of leadership that emphasizes quality. He uses Webster's definition of 'strategy' as being the science and art of enlisting and employing support for certain policies and purposes and for devising plans toward goals and 'tactics' by contrast, as involving actions or means of less magnitude or at a shorter distance from a base of operation than those of strategy and as small-scale actions serving a larger purpose. Quality leadership requires that balanced attention be given to both tactics and strategy. For proper balance, tactical requirements should be clearly linked to and dependent upon the strategic. They represent short-term and highly focused managerial expressions that characterize day-by-day leadership activity. Separated from the strategic, they are ends in themselves devoid of the purpose and meanings needed for quality leadership and quality schooling.[5]

Sergiovanni gives as an example the important tactical skill of mastering a contingency approach to leadership, characterized by careful reading of situations and by applying the right doses of the correct mix of leadership styles. Combine this skill with a leader who has certain

purposes, beliefs, and commitment to what the school is and can be and who can communicate these in a fashion that rallies others to the cause and we achieve proper balance according to Sergiovanni.[6] "What a leader stands for is more important than what he or she does."[7] In other words, the meanings a leader communicates to others are more important than his or her specific leadership style.

Sergiovanni's 10-P Model of Quality Leadership illustrated below incorporates ten principles that he feels are requirements for quality in leadership.[8] Leadership skills--the tactical side of the quality equation--are important. Leadership antecedents, leadership meanings, and leadership as cultural expression--the strategic side--are important too and he feels that these strategical requirements should never be sacrificed in favor of the tactical requirements.

THE 10-P MODEL OF QUALITY LEADERSHIP



'Prerequisites' refer to the leadership skill needed to develop and maintain basic leadership conpetence. Such skills as mastering and using various contingency leadership theories, conflict management

tactics, team management principles, shared decision-making models, and group processes techniques are examples of basic leadership requirements. Leadership skills are tactical in the sense that they are situationally specific, of short duration, and focused on specific objectives or outcomes.

The next four quality principles are leadership antecendents in the sense that they represent conditions, feelings, assumptions, cognitive maps, and attitudes of the leader that determine his or her reality and that guide his or her leadership decisions, actions and behavior. As antecendent vary among leaders, so does leadership quality and meaning.

'Perspective' refers to the ability of the leader to be able to differentiate between the tactical and strategic and to understand how they are related. What the leader stands for and believes in about schooling, the place of education in society, how schools should be organized and operated, and how people should be treated are the guiding 'principles' that give integrity and meaning to leadership. Leaders stand for certain ideals and principles that become cornerstones of their being.

'Platform' refers to the articulation of one's principles into an operational framework. Platforms are governing in the sense that they represent criteria and an implicit standard from which decisions are made.

'Politics' is the ability of an individual to influence another individual or group in a fashion that helps to achieve certain desired goals. Often, groups to be influenced are outside of the school itself, or are outside of the administrators legal authority. Typically, the

school administrator must obtain voluntary cooperation, support, and good will from others to get things done. Sensitivity to politics and knowledge that the leader is typically dependent upon the good wishes and voluntary compliance of others if he or she is to be effective in the long haul is necessary leadership antecedent.

Key to quality in leadership and quality in schooling is that teachers and others find their work interesting, satisfying, and meaningful. Meaning suggests as well that they believe in what they are doing and appreciate its importance to the school, society, and to themselves. Leadership meanings can be summed in four additional quality principles: purposing, planning, persisting, and peopling.

'Purposing' breathes life and meaning into the day-by-day activities of people at work in schools. It helps people to interpret their contributions, their successes and failures, their efforts and energies in light of the school's purposes. Purposing is the means by which leaders bring to the forefront of school activity the leadership antecedents of principle and platform. It represents the rallying point for bringing together all human resources into a common cause.

'Planning' is the articulation of purpose into concrete and long-term operational programs. Planning sketches out the major structures and design to be implemented, the major steps to be taken, and the major milestones to be achieved.

'Persisting' refers to the attention leaders give to important principles, issues, goals, and outcomes. Symbolically how an administrator uses time is a form of administrative attention that communicates meanings to others in the school.

'Peopling' recognizes that little can be accomplished by the

leader without the good wishes of others. The leader seeks to fine tune and match more closely the goals, objectives, and desires of people with those of the organization. Peopling is a key strategic requirement of quality leadership.

When leadership skills, antecedents, and meanings are successfully put into practice, Sergiovanni believes that we come to see leadership as less a behavioral style or management technique and more as cultural expression. The quality principle of 'patriotism' is key to viewing leadership as cultural expression.

Sergiovanni's ten principles together suggest a climate and commitment to work that goes well beyond mere competence and satisfactory performance. According to Sergiovanni, excellence cannot be born from mere competence; it results from the more intangible human qualities summed by his ten principles. He offers his principles as a new and more integrated way to view the quality requirements of leadership. They are validated, he says, in the writings of the human resources theorists (Bennis, Maslow, McGregor, Arygris, and Likert) who have long expressed these views, though perhaps not as a systematic whole as does Sergiovanni.

Peter Vaill defines high performing systems as those that perform excellently against a known external standard; perform excellently against what is assumed to be their potential level of performance; perform excellently relative to where they were at some earlier point in time; are judged qualitatively by informed observers to be doing substantially better than other comparable systems; do whatever they do with significantly fewer resources than is assumed are needed; are perceived as exemplars of the way to do whatever they do; and are

perceived to fulfill at a high level the ideals of the culture within which they exist. From his research Vaill identifies three common characteristics of the leaders of all the high performing systems he studied:

1. Leaders of high performing systems put in extraordinary amounts of time. They work hard. They demonstrate that they care. Their consciousness is dominated by the issues and events in the system of which they are a part.

2. Leaders of high performing systems have very strong feelings about the attainment of the system's purposes. They care deeply about the system.

3. Leaders of high performing systems focus on key issues and variables. They understand the concept "management of attention" and recognize the importance of modeling organizational purposes and values. They focus on what is important and are able to rally others to this purpose.

Vaill believes that it is this Time-Feeling-Focus, when brought together in the lifestyle of the leader, that results in a qualitative difference between competence and excellence in leadership. Like Sergiovanni, he emphasizes that what the leader stands for and communicates to others is more important than how he or she behaves given any particular set of circumstances.[9]

Educational Practice

Quantity and equity were measurements for determining the adequacy of public education in America for several decades. If they were achieved effectively and efficiently, educational quality was an expected and unchallenged given. That was the case until recently

when in 1983 A Nation At Risk was released to the American public and caused an unprecedented awareness for a need to specifically address the issue of quality in our Nation's public schools. As would be expected, America's educators, legislators, and general public rallied to the cause. More studies have been conducted and more papers have been written on the issue of quality and educational excellence in the last two years than at any other time in recent history. As a matter of fact, so much has been done and continues to be done that it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep pace with all that is being written.

The Secondary School Recognition Program (SSR), a product of the National Commission on Excellence, was established prior to the release of A Nation at Risk to identify and call public attention to a national group of schools that are unusually successful in meeting the educational needs of all their students. In seeking successful schools, the program also seeks schools that have overcome obstacles and problems, and that are continuing to concentrate on improvement. The writer has been an active participant in the selection process for recognizing some of our Nation's strongest schools for the past two years. The 14 attributes of success that are used to examine the overall quality of the schools and the seven indicators of success that are used to examine them are typical of the attributes and indicators found in much of the current literature. These attributes and indicators are becoming widely accepted quality criteria for measuring educational excellence in America's public as well as private secondary schools. This is occuring, in part, because of the department's deliberate attempt to involve many of the Nation's education and private sector leaders in

the program, both as school reviewers and school observers. These participating leaders are taking back into the public the exciting news about things they are learning about American education and its schools.

The 14 attributes of success that are used in the SSR to examine the overall quality of schools in our inner cities, small towns, suburban and rural areas are addressed by the schools in the nomination forms that they are required to complete for their participation in the program. In describing their programs, policies and practices that attribute to their school's success, they are asked to give detailed information about their (1) academic goals, (2) expectations for students, (3) order and discipline, (4) rewards and incentives for students, (5) monitoring of student progress, (6) opportunities for meaningful student responsibility and participation, (7) teacher efficacy, (8) rewards and incentives for teachers, (9) concentration on academic learning time, (10) school climate, (11) administrative leadership, (12) curriculum articulation, (13) evaluation for instructional improvement, and (14) community support and involvement.

The schools are required to also give the following information as indicators of their success: (1) student performance on standardized achievement tests, (2) student performance on minimum competency tests, numbers of students who go on to post-secondary education, find jobs, or enlist in the military, (4) daily student and teacher attendance rates and rates of student suspensions and other exclusions, (5) drop out rates, (6) awards for outstanding school programs and teachers, and (7) student awards and scholarships in academic or vocational competitions.

In addition to asking for information concerning their attributes of success and indicators of success, the schools are asked to provide

information about the characteristics of their school and district (e.g. number of students enrolled; number of elementary, junior high/middle, and high schools; number of residents in the district; district classification--large city, medium city, small town, suburban or rural; student racial/ethnic composition; percentage of students from low income families; primary educational needs of the students served by the school; indication of how these needs were determined and whether there are ongoing procedures for reviewing their relevance; entrance requirement, if any, for getting into the school; the number of full and part-time professional and support staff personnel, and length of time that the principal and other administrators have been in their respective positions). Finally schools are asked to elaborate on their progress toward excellence by describing conditions or changes over the past 3-5 years that have contributed most to their overall success and obstacles and impediments that their school has had to overcome in the past 3-5 years.

The site visitors that observed schools that are being recognized for 1984-85 summarized their observations for the review panelist in June 1985. They found that there are many different roads to excellence and unusually successful schools can come in all shapes and sizes and from various classifications. The truly outstanding schools had several similar characteristics. They had leaders who were role models; well liked; facilitating; willing to make changes; dedicated; open; in control and knew what was going on; respected by teachers, students and parents; high energy level; and visible in school and community. The teachers were hard-working, dedicated and committed; recognized as experts; willing to change when needed; involved in decision-making,

team efforts, community activites and state, national and professional organizations. Both teachers and administrators were described as child oriented, caring and guided by a sense of purpose that carried over to the students.

The school climate was positive, safe, orderly, warm and relaxed. The term 'family' was often used to describe how people felt about being a part of the school. There was not a preoccupation with issues relating to student discipline. The buildings and grounds were clean and well-maintained. There were little, if any signs of graffito or vandalism. Students exhibited school pride, a sense of self-worth and they "liked" being at school. They attended school regularly, scored well on standardized tests and they were actively involved in school activities. Their achievements were recognized as well as rewarded.

In the classrooms students were attentive and on task. Teachers were knowledgeable and used a variety of techniques. Exemplary teaching practices observed were development of higher level thinking skills, effective use of time and positive reinforcement. School-wide emphasis on writing was evident. Attempts were made to meet needs of low and high achievers and/or special needs students. Student progress was closely monitored and communicated.

Parents were involved in the school and community support was strong. The school reached out to their community and their community reached back to them. Parents, students and staff report that "school is a nice place to be." Many of the schools overcame recent obstacles and problems and learned how to effectively deal with them. High expectations by everyone associated with the school helped to produce overall excellence.

The site visitors reported that there are two things that are transportable from these successful schools: (1) awareness of what can be done and (2) ideas about how to do it. In order to make changes, schools must first become aware of good practices. Then they must have the desire to change and an administrator who facilitates. Schools face similar problems and can share successful practices if they are put in touch with each other.

Current Policies

In February, 1978, Johathan Sher addressed the first national conference sponsored by People United for Rural Enducation entitled "Rural Education: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow." He delivered his rousing speech, "Education in Rural America: A Reassessment of Conventional Wisdom," to a packed house of educators, legislators and rural citizens from Iowa and around the country.[10] He called it "a rare opportunity" to be able to address an audience where the participants were both genuinely knowledgeable about rural education and deeply committed to rural schools. He talked about an anti-rural bias that was deep-seeded in our American society which was neither intentional or deliberate, but nevertheless existed. He talked about economy, efficiency and equality--the myths of rural school consolidation. He warned the participants against allowing state and federal officials and education professionals to control the decisions that would determine the future destiny of rural schools and he encouraged rural citizens to stand up and make their wants, needs and desires known.

At the state level he encouraged citizens to fight against the passage of any mandatory consolidation or reorganization legislation because while it was conceivable that consolidation would be beneficial

in some cases, it was even more likely that any blanket consolidation would end up including communities for whom such a reform was unnecessary, inappropriate, or even harmful. He also encouraged citizens at the state level to work toward eliminating over regulation of local schools and districts by the state. He emphasized that states have a right and indeed an obligation to set standards, but they make a serious mistake when they try to dictate how these standards should be achieved at the local level. Finally, he told the conference participants to encourage and develop alternatives to consolidation that would expand and improve educational opportunities to rural youngsters and communities without causing them to lose their community based schools.

At the federal level, Sher called for support for the development of a federal rural initiative. He reported that for the first time in his memory, there were high ranking federal officials who showed beginnings of an interest in promoting rural education. He said he had been asked to prepare a description of what a federal rural education initiative should include. He shared information on the document that he prepared for the federal government which contained three major sets of activities.

The first component of the proposed federal rural education initiative called for re-examining existing programs to reflect rural needs. The set of activities to support this component included: A re-examiniation of all formula-based funding programs and a revision of those that might discriminate against rural communities. A re-examination of all criteria that is used to award competitive grants and contracts and to make the necessary changes that exclude rural applicants. The inauguration of across-the-board rural set asides and

competitions. The creation of a staff office for rural education within each federal agency.

The second component of the initiative called for stepped up rural assistance programs to be sponsored by the federal government. The set of activities to support this component included: Federally funded state-administered Rural Advisory Services in each state to deliver comprehensive technical assistance services to rural schools and rural districts. Teacher training programs to prepare persons interested in going into rural service. In-service education programs to assist practicing rural teachers, administrators, and school board members. Developing and testing innovative strategies for improving the linkage between rural education and rural development. Helping to create and/or expand existing sub-state rural resource cooperatives through which rural schools and districts could share a pool of specialized human, material and technical resources. Lastly, provide financial assistance for rural school construction and renovation.

The third component in Sher's federal proposal called for creating a National Research Initiative on Rural Education in order to fill the void of incomplete and inadequate knowledge and information on rural education. The goal here was to gain a more accurate understanding of what's really happening in rural schools and, thereby, create a more effective program of federal assistance to rural education. In order to accomplish this, Sher suggested that considerable attention should be directed toward creating a National Center on Rural Education that would focus its attention on conducting research on key rural education issues; monitoring state-level rural education developments across the country; providing technical assistance to state legislators, state

boards and departments of education, state and national education organizations and rural citizen's groups; and serving as a resource for State Advisory Services in order to help them be more effective in helping local rural schools and rural districts.

Sher admitted that his proposal for a federal rural education initiative was an ambitious one and that he had no way of knowing if any or all of his suggestions would eventually be implemented by Congress and the Administration. What he did find was that there was general agreement among the P.U.R.E. conference participants that the reforms that he talked about were needed and that they were worth pursuing.

Sher's reassessment of conventional wisdom concerning rural education came at a time when frustrations were running high among those who were working to maintain and improve the stance of rural education in America. The frustration level was especially high in the rural Midwest where there has been a long and cherished tradition of local control and self-reliance. The enactment of state controlled funding formulas to ensure statewide equalization and efficiency of educational expenditures; declining rural school populations; legislative proposals for mandatory statewide school reorganizations; and a growing number of educational policies that appeared to be discriminatory against rural schools were issues that posed serious threats to rural citizens and their ability to control the future of their schools and rural way of life.

In the early and mid 70s little, if any, attention was being given to the problems of rural education at either the state or federal levels of government. There was a preoccupation with problems associated with urban education. Government policies, rules and regulations were being developed to help solve urban education problems with little regard as

to what affect they might have on schools in rural America. The prevailing attitude appeared to be one that if it was good for city kids, it had to be good for their country cousins. This lack of government concern for rural education and rural schools carried over into the academic community and was also evident in state and national educational organiations and associations. Simply put, it was quite difficult in the 70s to find people that were interested in learning more about rural education problems and it was even more difficult to find someone that was willing to do anything about them. Although significant changes have occurred at the federal level during the 1980s in terms of rural education policy, the writer is not convinced that this change has filtered down throughout the states.

A case in point concerning the lack of state response to rural school funding problems is drawn from the writer's personal experience as a superintendent of a small rural Iowa school district. The CAL Community School District was described by researchers from Boston University's Institute for Responsive Education in 1978 as "small, rural and good!" In terms of the attributes and indicators of success that are used to examine schools in the Secondary School Recognition Program, one would have to judge CAL as being unusually successful. CAL's students, staff, parents and patrons believe in the school; they are extremely satisfied with what it accomplishes; and they definitely want to keep it.

CAL's K-12 student population has dropped 3 to 5 percent a year (from 422 students in 1972-73 to 257 in 1984-85). Because of that drop in students plus the fact that the district's per pupil expenditures exceeded the state average in 1971, Iowa's plan for statewide equalization

has limited the school's budget growth to less than 2 percent a year. The district's large area (117 square miles) or rich farmland (valued at $103,959,989 in 1984) has caused the school to receive less than 6 percent of its annual revenue from state sources under Iowa's School Foundation Program. Public surveys conducted in 1975, 1980 and 1985 consistently prove that over 90 percent of the CAL residents oppose school reorganization and more than 85 percent are willing to support increases in their local taxes to maintain the district's educational programs and facilities. Voters in the district have verified this commitment as they have overwhelmingly voted in favor of two 10 year local option schoolhouse tax referendums since 1973 and two 5 year local option enrichment tax referendums since 1976 to help offset the severe spending limits imposed upon the school by the state. Even with this added local effort, the school's total operating budget has been limited to a 71 percent increase between July 1, 1971 and June 30, 1984. This has occurred during a 13 year period when the Nation's Consumer Price Index rose 187 percent and Iowa's School Equalization Plan allowed some school districts located near urban centers to increase their state controlled regular program expenditures by as much as 272 percent. The most devastating effect that this dilemma has had on CAL as well as other rural schools in similar situations is that they are seeing a growing salary disparity between rural and urban teachers. In 1972-73 average BA starting salaries for rural and urban teachers varied by only $300. In 1984-85 that difference grew to $1,600. Top paid teachers in urban schools were earning on the average $3,000 more than rural school teachers in 1972-73. In 1984-85 that difference grew to $9,000. The growing disparity in teacher salaries which is caused by

insufficient funding for rural schools goes unheeded by state government officials and bargaining associations. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly more difficult for rural schools to attract and hold good teachers. Ultimately, the quality of instruction that rural schools are able to offer will be affected by this problem.

Analysis of Trends Which May Influence Local Leadership and Quality Rural Education Over the Next 5 to 10 Years

In his speech delivered at the 1984 National Rural Education Forum, former Secretary of Education T. H. Bell stated:

> Rural America represents much of what is good and enduring in our society and contains many of the traditional American values that will keep our society strong in the future. Sociologists have observed that a state's character, culture, economy, values, beliefs, and social attitudes have been traditionally shaped by its small towns. . . . The cause of rural education that is so effectively advocated by rural constituents is almost sacred. [11]

Statements from prominent educational leaders concerning the value and cause of rural education have been made more frequently in the 1980s. Such statements give new energy to those who are concentrating their efforts on improving the quality of educational opportunities to our Nation's rural and small town youth and adults. President Reagan in his letter to the 1984 Forum participants stated, "My Administration maintains a strong commitment to rural education and understands its significant role in the future of America."

The Department of Education's policy on Rural Education and Rural Family Education for the 80s gives substance to the federal government's position on rural education and demonstrates that it is more than a "flash-in-the-pan." The policy responds to many of the concerns listed earlier by Sher and others who are knowledgeable and genuinely interested in rural education.

Five national trends will be identified in addition to the one mentioned above which, in the writer's opinion may influence local leadership and quality rural education over the next 5 to 10 years.

First, the shift in population growth from urban centers to rural areas reported by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1980 is evidence that rural America shows strength for future years. Americans appreciate quality living and a growing number of Americans are turning to rural America to find it. This is probably one of the most significant trends which may influence local leadership and quality rural education over the next 5 to 10 years. This trend is significant not only in terms of more people choosing to live in rural areas, but the fact that people are doing so for reasons other than simple economics. They are looking for a life style that will give them the quality experiences that they value for themselves and their children. Rural schools will play an important role in fulfilling their expectations for quality life in rural America.

In the rural Midwest where farmers and small towns are struggling through a prolonged agricultural recession, state government officials and local leaders are working furiously to find ways to diversify their economic basis in order to lighten their dependency on agriculture. This, too, shows strength for the future of rural America and the willingness of its people to face difficult change with optimism and to work toward economic stability through diversification. In years past, rural America was viewed by many with nostalgic memories of "what used to be." Today many more view rural America as a prospect for "what it can be."

A second significant trend influencing local leadership and quality

rural education is the renewed attention that small schools and rural districts are getting from major educational associations and citizens groups. The national Rural Education Association established in 1907 as an affiliate of NEA made a major move in 1980 when its membership elected to become an independent organization serving as a single voice for all who were interested in rural education. Since that time REA has stepped up its activities to serve the needs of rural schools.[12] The Small Schools Division of the American Association of School Administrators sponsors an annual summer in-service conference for small school district administrators where the participants focus on critical issues of small schools. AASA has also increased its number of small school topic sessions at the national convention. The National School Board Association announced recently its newly created Rural District Forum. Its proposed services will include two national conferences each year designed exclusively for leaders of rural school systems where particpants will have opportunities to delve into rural educational issues in intense workshop settings. Citizens groups, similar to Iowa's People United for Rural Education, are being organized throughout the states. The groups are becoming more sophisticated in their ability to influence public thinking in their states and local communities as well as provide meaningful in-service activities for their membership and schools.

A third trend in rural education is the increased practice of pooling resources and using new technologies to expand program opportunities efficiently and effectively to rural and small town youth and adults. Sub-state regional cooperatives such as Iowa's 15 Area Education Agencies are providing small and rural schools with specialized support

services in special education, media and other areas. Ohio's Regional Vocational Education Centers are delivering cost effective vocational education to large numbers of school districts. Jointly administered programs between community colleges and clusters of rural high schools and between business and local schools are yet another means of expanding career and advanced college placement opportunities. Program sharing of students, teachers and other human and/or material resources between two small districts are also becoming popular in rural areas. Computers, micro-wave two-way telecommunication networks, electronic newslines and tele-conferencing are a few of the new technologies that are bringing up-to-date information and expanded program opportunities to even the most remote rural regions of our country. All of these practices make the discussion for rural school consolidation seem inappropriate. Local rural education leaders are constantly looking for new and expanded ways to bring quality education and services to rural America. To phrase a popular cliche, "We ain't seen nothing yet."

A fourth trend that has significance for local leadership and quality rural education is the creation of a number of University Rural Education Centers on campuses throughout the country. Their primary focus on introducing new rural dimensions to their teacher preparation programs; providing forums for discussing rural issues and concerns; stimulating rural education research; and expanding rural teacher and administrator staff-development in-service activities are providing rural leaders with the tools they need to make better decisions and building quality rural education programs.

State responses to the Nation at Risk report are indeed mixed, but nevertheless they are all affecting rural education in both positive

and negative ways. Some states are trying to legislate quality education by enacting new standards, course requirements, and other mandates that rural schools with limited resources find difficult, if not impossible, to meet. Paul Nachtigal finds that many of the legislative decisions are being made without good data. "If they are going to use quality as the issue, they should face it head-on and put more energy into delivering services to rural schools."[13] Illinois State Superintendent Ted Sanders recently called for a major school reorganization to provide minimum enrollment of 500 students in all Illinois high schools. The recommendation was based on a study of student achievement data where student performance in high schools with enrollments between 494 and 1,279 students was highest. Sander's recommendation would require 55 percent of the state's high schools to consolidate.[14] On the other hand, Iowa's Excellence in Education Task Force after doing 16 months of indepth study of the state's educational system concluded that a dramatic reorganization of the state school system will not improve education. A decentralized secondary system can and will continue to serve a state that has the size and social cohesion of Iowa, the Task Force reported. In their report entitled First in the Nation in Education the Task Force reported that schools should be diverse in the state of Iowa. Small schools and large schools, public and private--each has its strengths. Funding and structure should recognize these strengths and should allow diversity to continue.[15]

The fifth trend, state responses to the Nation at Risk report and the affect that their actions are having on rural education, is at best mixed. "What we know from experience," says Nachtigal, "that you close down a rural community by closing down its schools. Rural schools do

more than educate students. They are the heart of the economic and social vitality of the community."[16]

Agenda for Action to Facilitate Local Leadership and Quality Rural Education

An action agenda for facilitating local leadership and quality education in rural America is already in place--it merely needs to be followed through. The national Rural Education Association presented its Association's official National Rural Education Research Agenda in a report submitted to the U.S. Department of Education's Inter-agency Committee on Rural Education in June 1985. The agenda reflects the views of the REA Executive Board and Research Committee for the Association's research priorities in rural education. The individuals on the Executive Board and Research Committee represent a cross-section from over 20 different states of experts on rural education in the university community, the federal government, the state offices of education, education service units and teachers and administrators in rural schools. The agenda's nine major themes focus research on (1) rural school effectiveness, (2) staff development and professional support, (3) curriculum and instruction, (4) taxonomy of rural education, (5) federal, state and local policies empacting rural schools and communities, (6) rural school finance, (7) school district governance and organization, (8) assessment of rural school assumptions, and (9) role of the school in rural development. Comprehensive data is lacking in virtually all of these areas, suggesting the need for a balance in research across the entire agenda. (See appendix for a sampling of suggested research topics beneath each theme.)

The federal government recognizes the unique and valuable

contribution rural America has made to both the social and economic development of this country. In response to rural educators asking for no more than "equity" in their attempts to work within the Federal and State education structures to assure rural and small town youths and adults equal educational opportunities, the Department of Education announced its Rural Education and Rural Family Education Policy for the 80s in October 1983. This declaration of policy established the official position of the Department in support of rural education.

RURAL EDUCATION SHALL RECEIVE AN EQUITABLE SHARE OF THE INFORMATION, SERVICES, ASSISTANCE AND FUNDS AVAILABLE FROM AND THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND ITS PROGRAMS.

In response to the policy, the Department of Education outlined 10 initiatives that it was prepared to take in regard to its goal of serving rural education equitably. The Department's Rural Education Committee meets regularly and prepares a report annually on the Department's progress toward carrying out these initiatives.

It is critical to the future of rural and small town America that the 50 state departments of education follow suit and provide rural education in their states with an equitable share of their attention and resources. Just as the federal government has recognized the unique and valuable contributions rural America has made to both the social and economic development of this country, so must state governments recognize the unique and valuable contribution rural and small town folks have made to both the social and economic development of their states. State education agendas need to allow for educational diversity. School funding and structure should recognize the strengths of both large and small, urban and rural schools.

State policy makers that are critical of the quality of education in their rural schools must face the issue head on and put more energy into delivering quality services to their rural schools and provide sufficient funding to their rural schools so that they can raise the level of the quality of their programs. States that are contemplating closing down small rural schools must realize that they, in essence, are closing down their rural communities as they will be pulling out the heart of their economic and social vitality.

Local communities and educators in rural America need to recognize their schools' strengths and weaknesses. They need to assess where their schools are and where they want them to be. They need to set clear goals for their schools. They need to realize that their schools must provide their young people with the basic educational tools necessary to enter an increasingly complex and global society where the demands of the workplace are constantly changing. They need to know what their schools can do well on their own and where they need additional assistance. They need to strive to be the best that they can be. They must realize that they cannot operate in a vacuum. They must be willing to influence state level decisions that will affect their funding and structure.

Local communities and educators must take the initiative to form an effective rural education network which includes their educational associations, citizens groups, state education agencies, the higher education community and state and federal policy makers. Through this network rural issues and concerns can be discussed, researched and solutions developed and shared.

Rural America has traditionally provided this Nation with outstanding leadership in education, business, industry and government. Rural values have helped keep the Nation strong. Rural education has been successful in the past, it is successful at present, and with vision and leadership it will be successful in the future.

APPENDIX

Listed in priority order in this Appendix are those themes which comprise the Rural Education Association's national rural education research agenda. A thematic approach was adopted in order to organize the multitude of research topics requiring investigation. Listed beneath each theme are several research topics. A more complete listing of detailed topics will certainly evolve as rural education practitioners organize and plan their research within these thematic categories.

1 - RURAL SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

-Assessment of student achievement in rural schools

-Characteristics of effective rural schools (as viewed from both elementary and secondary perspectives)

-Characteristics of effective leadership in rural schools (as viewed from both elementary and secondary perspectives)

-Strategies which capitalize on the strengths of small schools and seek to correct the deficiencies

-Successful practices/programs in rural schools at both the elementary and secondary level that can be replicated

-Strategies to meet the needs of special populations in rural areas (eg., minorities, special education, etc.)

-Etc.

2 - STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

-Strategies for the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel

-The development of staff inservice training programs to meet the needs of rural teachers

-Determine how technology can best be used as a means of conducting useful staff inservice

-Identify and develop preservice training needs of prospective rural teachers (eg., multiple certification, alternative training models, field based experience, etc.)

-Assess needs of administrators and support staff in dealing with problems such as professional isolation, limited staffing, professional development, curriculum development, etc.

-Etc.

3 - CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

-Successful methodologies and practices which increase the effectiveness of the instructional program and student learning in small and/or multi-grade classrooms

-Curricular needs in rural schools which enhance rural development as well as meet the needs of those students who plan to leave the rural community and those who elect to stay

-Advancing technologies as a way to improve content and breadth of instruction for basic, special, and vocational education

-Strategies which enhance and broaden curricular offerings in small high schools

-Etc.

4 - TAXONOMY OF RURAL EDUCATION

-Determine what constitutes a rural school

-Characteristics of rural schools as perceived at national, regional, state, and local levels

-Classification of rural schools by (a) size, (b) geographic region, (c) degree of remoteness and/or isolation, (d) etc.

-Demographic make-up of students who attend rural schools

-Determine where America's rural schools are located

-Identify definitions of rural, remote, isolated and small schools at national, regional, state, and local levels

-Differences between rural and urban schools

-Etc.

5 - FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL POLICIES IMPACTING RURAL SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

-Analysis of federal legislation and education policies on rural schools

-Analysis of state legislation and policies on rural schools

-Impact of educational reform movements, blue ribbon commissions, etc. (federal, state, and local) on rural schools

-Strategies to increase awareness for rural education within state offices of education

-Etc.

6 - RURAL SCHOOL FINANCE

-Strategies to stabilize revenue while operating on a small tax base

-Distribution, utilization, and effects of federal and state education funds in rural schools and districts

-Ways to equalize salary levels and other employment benefits for rural teachers in comparison to salary and benefits awarded urban teachers

-Financial implications of major enrollment shifts in rural schools

-Politics of school finance in rural communities

-Creation of new revenue sources and alternative funding formulas for rural schools

-Assess economic impact to rural schools of changes in the agriculture community (eg., decreased farm property evaluation, setbacks in agriculture production, etc.)

-Etc.

7 - SCHOOL DISTRICT GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATION

-Effects of consolidation on rural schools, rural children, and rural communities

-Determine the economic, educational, and social effects of class, school, and district size and structure in rural communities

-Evaluation of the role and/or contribution of educational service centers in rural areas

-Organizational implications of major enrollment shifts in rural schools

-Politics of school and district organization in rural America

-Alternatives to school district consolidation

-Strategies to improve efficiency in organization and administration of rural schools

-Determine ways to promote parent and community involvement in the education process of rural youngsters

-Etc.

8 - ASSESSMENT OF RURAL SCHOOL ASSUMPTIONS

-Support for claims that rural schools are superior because of individualized instruction, greater community involvement, local control, etc.

-Assess strengths and weaknesses commonly associated with rural schools

-The role of the community and its effect on rural education

-Assessment of the rural school, community, and family in meeting the socialization needs of rural youth

-Etc.

9 - ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

-Economic impact of school closure on the rural community

-The school's role in helping to facilitate manpower needs in the rural community

-The school as an economic multiplier in the area

-Use of the school facility for purposes other than education of young people

-Position and significance of the school in shaping the image of the rural community

-Use of the school as a mechanism to promote rural development

-Etc.

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To further the improvement of Educational Opportunities for all children in rural areas by:

a. *Promoting state and regional delivery systems which bring about efficient and effective education for children in rural areas.*
b. *Serving as the national advocate and representative for rural education.*
c. *Providing coordination, at the national level, for rural education programs and activities.*
d. *Brokering assistance of appropriate agencies and individuals to meet the needs of small schools.*
e. *Encouraging colleges and universities to develop materials and resources specifically for rural schools and to train school personnel to work more effectively in small schools.*

f. *Encouraging the collection and dissemination of promising practices, statistical data, and other appropriate information relating to rural education as well as the sharing of services and resources among educational organizations and agencies.*

g. *Providing leadership for rural education related conferences and workshops.*

h. *Providing a forum for all those involved in public education in areas--including teachers, administrators, board members, and members of the rural community at large whereby they may come together professionally and exchange ideas.*

i. *Stressing the need for public and private agencies to develop educational materials and technology appropriate to children in rural areas.*

13. See "Consolidation Rises Again," Education USA (Washington, D.C., National Public Relations Association, Vol. 27, No. 38, May 20, 1985, p. 289).

14. Ibid.

15. Iowa Task Force on Excellence in Education (1984), First in the Nation in Education, Des Moines, Iowa, October 1984.

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JAMES D. JESS

James Jess is superintendent of the CAL Community School District in Latimer, Iowa. He received his doctorate in educational administration from Drake University. His twenty years of experience as a rural teacher, counselor, principal and superintendent gives him a practical understanding of local leadership and quality rural education. In 1977, Jess helped organize People United for Rural Education, an Iowa based citizens' organization that achieved national recognition in the spring of 1978 when it was selected as winner of the National Volunteer Activist Award presented by the National Center of Voluntary Action. Jess is the immediate past president of the national Rural Education Association headquartered at Colorado State University. He serves as one of seven citizen members on Iowa's Excellence in Education Task Force appointed by the bi-partisan leadership of the Iowa General Assembly and was chair of the 1983-84 subcommittee on Education and Industry Coordination. He was appointed by Terrel Bell to serve as a review panelist for the department's Secondary School Recognition Program and was reappointed to the panel by Secretary William Bennett. He has served on many state and national committees; he has made presentations at numerous state, regional and national meetings; and he authored a number of articles for state and national professional education journals and other publications. In addition to his school responsibilities, he and his wife are co-owners of a family retail clothing business. He is on the board of directors of the Latimer Development Corporation and has served as vice president of his local church council.